Catholic education threatens new action

Christian union does not exclude new strikes

Just before the beginning of the new school year, Minister Vanderpoorten (VLD) and the Catholic education network are once more at each other’s throats. Director De Wolf, head of the Catholic umbrella organisation, announced a large-scale campaign intended to force the Minister to release more money for the Catholic network. The Minister finds the campaign pretty aggressive and does not understand what has got into Catholic education. The government is simply continuing the catch-up operation of the last government (which also included the CD&V), claims Vanderpoorten and a further 37 million euros has already been released. Also the Christian teachers’ union is dissatisfied and is again threatening to strike if the Minister does not accept ‘posting’ (a sort of early retirement) for teachers below the age of fifty (FF).

Gust Van Dongen from the Christian Education Union: ‘We will not seek out conflict. But if at the talks at the end of September Education Minister Marleen Vanderpoorten is not prepared to do something about posting for teachers who have not yet reached 50, we will pull out. If so, strikes are a distinct possibility. We will organise them differently, more effectively than last year. Announce them in good time and inform people better.’ Even the VSKO, the umbrella organisation of the Catholic education network, is promising to make it a ‘hot school year’. Currently, thousands of posters are being distributed calling for equal financial rights for pupils in free education. For this, the VSKO refers to a study on the flow of money to the various networks. According to Director André De Wolf, the Minister is trying to put the promised catch-up action on the backburner with ‘political games’. ‘Even the increase in working subsidies promised for this year has not emerged,’ says De Wolf. Catholic education will not participate in a new meeting of the roundtable conference on education. New action will follow in the autumn.

INTRODUCTION

The new political year has not yet begun and the purple-green coalition has already gone through its first crisis. And yet no party seems to want to push things so far that the government falls over the delivery of 5,500 machine guns by the Walloon weapons manufacturer FN to Nepal. However, Magda Aelvoet, the Green Minister for Consumer Affairs, Health and the Environment, felt that she was no longer able to stay on. After all, in the federal cabinet on 11 July she agreed to grant an export licence to the Walloon weapons factory. Her resignation was a personal decision, Aelvoet stressed. She had a moral conflict with a decision she had helped take. Her successor, Jef Tavernier, on the contrary, can take up his post as Green Minister with a clean slate. Under pressure from the Green grass roots he attached an extra condition to the sale that the delivery not take place before the November elections in Nepal. According to the greens, Premier Verhofstadt finally yielded after their insistent pressure, although he had emphasised earlier in the Chamber that the entire government continued to back the decision. In De Morgen and De Standaard, meanwhile, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Louis Michel (MR), is accused of being as cunning as a fox. Strictly speaking he could have taken the decision alone, but he left it to the inner cabinet. At the same time he neglected to inform ministers of a report from his administration that painted a far from rosy picture of the situation in Nepal, quickly had all references to a civil war in Nepal on his ministry’s website removed and dismissed the rejection of a similar licence by the German government as ‘a suspension’ of the decision. De Standaard of 29 August makes a nonsense of his Germany story. The paper attaches a rather weighty conclusion to the story: if Germany did reject the licence, it should have notified its EU partners of this in accordance with the European code of conduct for weapons exports. If Belgium received such a report, it should first have discussed the matter with Germany in accordance with this same code before granting the licence. Did Michel inform the inner cabinet? And was Aelvoet aware? Michel owes Parliament an explanation, says the paper, which also concludes that the Weapons Act of 1991 literally precludes any deliveries of weapons to a country with ‘a threat of internal armed conflict’. Nepal has gone far beyond this boundary, the paper believes.

Paul Geudens - Gazet Van Antwerpen - 30 August
Flemish greens and socialists are saddled with weapon deliveries to Nepal

both parties demand a parliamentary investigation

The Green parties and the Flemish Socialists are being rather annoyed about the delivery of 5,500 "Minimi" machine guns to Nepal. On 11 July Ministers Frank Vandenbroucke (SPA), Isabelle Durant (Ecolo) and Magda Aelvoet (Agalev) approved the delivery in a meeting of the Federal inner cabinet. This they cannot deny. Furthermore, according to De Morgen (24 August), deliveries of weapons to Pakistan and India were also approved (a week later). Although Agalev Minister Aelvoet was present, Jos Geysels, Political Secretary of the Flemish Greens, is calling the decision incomprehensible and the report that Germany had blocked similar deliveries to Nepal 'a new political fact'. But he does not feel the 'incorrect decisions' are worthy of a change of views will then reveal whether the problems in Nepal are really as serious as many human rights organisations have been saying for two days. (...) In the meantime, they may show a little less loyalty towards coalition partner Louis Michel. Now that this debate has been underway for several days, we can at least say that Louis Michel overdid things a bit on one or two occasions. In contrast to what Michel himself said, Germany, following protests by the Greens, blocked a delivery of weapons to Nepal. Let this be a lesson for Agalev. And the word in Michel's department was that the assessment report of his administration showed that the situation in the Himalayan state was 'anything but kosher' in a number of areas. Apparently the colleague Vice-Premiers did not receive that report.

Opinion

RIK VAN CAUWELAERT • KNACK • 28 AUGUST

When the Nepalese question came fully to light, the memory of Minister Aelvoet played its part. 'I was at that inner cabinet meeting and I can remember that a number of weapons deliveries were discussed there.' But with the best will in the world, the Green minister could not remember that there was also a file on Nepal. On Sunday she recalled everything as clear as day and Aelvoet amicably endorsed the decision to supply weapons to Nepal, which she had approved together with those others present at the inner cabinet meeting.

Anyone who follows the Wetstraat (rue de la Loi) could find out that Aelvoet had received several phone calls from Wetstraat 16 and from other offices between Thursday 22 and Sunday 25 August that boosted her failing memory. Because for Ecolo in particular, this 'trou de mémoire' on the part of Aelvoet was extremely inopportune. For the Francophone Greens this is not the time to offend Elio Di Rupo's PS. They are looking for an alliance with the Walloon Socialists for the next elections. It will surprise no one that Vice-Premier Laurette Onkelinx, on behalf of the PS, recently called Green Cabinet Ministers Isabelle Durant and Magda Aelvoet to order.

Opinion

RUUD GOOSENS • DE MORGEN • 24 AUGUST

Because their Excellencies Frank Vandenbroucke and Magda Aelvoet jumped on the Louis Michel (MR) bandwagon at the inner cabinet meeting on 11 July (MR), an 'in-depth debate in the Parliament' was the only thing Patrick Janssens and Jos Geysels dared request. This parliamentary examination

DE FINANCIeel • ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 27 AUGUST

In Le Soir, Michel revealed his displeasure at the campaign that emerged recently on the Flemish side concerning the export licence to FN for the delivery of 5,500 machine guns to Nepal. The minister defends the decision, which was 'approved in the inner cabinet by the Vice-Premiers of all coalition parties'. He continues to maintain that it is ethically correct. 'Nepal has a democratic regime. I admit that it is a young, fragile and certainly imperfect regime, but it is democratic. The country has fallen victim to a guerrilla who has recourse to kidnap, torture and terrorist attacks. I believe that it is ethical to give a democratic regime the chance to defend itself against such things,' said Michel in Le Soir. The Deputy Minister also claimed in the interview that the 'smear campaign' concerning the export licence was damaging the whole country economically. Michel received declarations of support from the Walloon employers' organisation, the UWE, which claimed that weapons export laws 'had been scrupulously applied' in this case.
Cornered federal minister Aelvoet resigns

SP.A is calling to incorporate European code of conduct in Belgian law for weapon exports

FF EDITORIAL TEAM

Late on Monday evening the green Federal Minister for Consumer Affairs, Health and the Environment, Magda Aelvoet, resigned. Aelvoet got into a moral dilemma because she had approved the delivery of weapons to Nepal in the inner cabinet meeting on 11 July and was therefore unable to distance herself from it. With the information she now has, she can no longer ‘reconcile the approval with her conviction’. According to De Morgen, Aelvoet also had to put up with considerable criticism at grass roots level in her own party. Nevertheless, both Agalev’s Political Secretary Jos Geysels and Premier Verhofstadt insisted that Aelvoet ‘slept on it for another night’. However, Aelvoet stood by her decision. Premier Verhofstadt regrets the resignation and emphasises that the government and all government parties, including Agalev, ‘want to finish the job’.

On the evening of 28 August, Agalev’s Party Council appointed Jef Tavernier as Magda Aelvoet’s successor as Minister for Consumer Affairs, Health and the Environment. Tavernier is parliamentary party leader of the Flemish Greens in the Federal Parliament. The new minister said that the sale of weapons does not go without saying, that conditions should be placed on such deliveries, but that the case was not worthy of a government crisis. The SP.A is calling on the government to incorporate the European code of conduct in Belgian law for weapons exports.

Opinion

YVES DESMET • DE MORGEN • 28 AUGUST

He was ‘surprised and deeply sad’, Louis Michel (MR). As far as the degree of hypocrisy is concerned, this beats everything. The Minister for Foreign Affairs and in his innermost thoughts this country’s real premier took a clever but not perfect course in the case of the weapons exports to Nepal. Although he formally has the sole power to grant such licences independently, the Minister, alarmed by reports from his own departments on the situation in Nepal, decided to bring everybody on board by putting the matter on the agenda of the inner cabinet meeting. From that moment it was the government, and not himself, who was holding the hot potato. Cleverly done, and why Magda Aelvoet let herself become involved still remains a mystery.

DEFENCE INDUSTRY IN BELGIUM

WEAPON EXPORTS IN 2001

917 licences were granted worth 848 miljoen euros
26 licences were refused worth 4.3 miljoen euros

source: de standaard
Bickering in Flemish movement flares up again

discussions between official pilgrimage committee and the far right

Sunday 25 August saw the holding of the 75th IJzer Pilgrimage. In terms of attendance and enthusiasm it was not exactly a high point for this ‘high mass of the Flemish Movement’. In the week preceding the event, the division within the Flemish movement again rose to the surface. The so-called ‘Working Committee for Radicalisation’, a group of primarily far-right organisations, supported by the Vlaams Blok, called for an anti-event on the other side of the IJzer. The official IJzer Pilgrimage Committee feared a repeat of what happened in 1996, when far-right thugs, encouraged by the Vlaams Blok, provoked riots and seriously marred the whole event. According to De Standaard (24 August), discussions between the far right and the official IJzer Pilgrimage Committee led by Lionel Vandenberghe are centring on the interpretation of the IJzer Testament, a combination of texts left behind by the Front Movement. This movement of pro-Flemish soldiers arose in the trenches behind the IJzer during the First World War (1914-1918) (FF).

BART BRINCKMAN • DE STANDAARD • 24 AUGUST

The Radicalisation Committee and the Vlaams Blok do not accept that the slogans ‘self-government, no more war and truce’ have been updated to freedom, peace and tolerance. They accuse the official Committee of adopting too half-hearted an approach because it does not unconditionally demand Flemish independence and rejects the idea of ‘own people first’. But even the changes made to the pilgrimage itself came in for criticism. For a number of Flemish nationalists, the clear separation of the celebration of the Eucharist and the secular part is an attack on tradition. The fact that in May this year the Committee organised a peace concert in the field - involving, among others, the rai singer Khaled - was even seen as sacrilege. Dirk Demeurie, Secretary of the IJzer Pilgrimage Committee, defends the move: ‘The initiatives must broaden public support. All the democratic parties were present at that peace concert. Perhaps this will mean fewer people will take part in the pilgrimage. But we will bring a lot more visitors to the site, the tower and its peace museum. For us it is the overall picture that counts, not just the pilgrimage.’

No serious incidents at 75th IJzer Pilgrimage

At the request of the official IJzer Pilgrimage Committee, on 23 August the court in Veurne banned any counter-event in Diksmuide during the official IJzer Pilgrimage. That ban applied to any form of counter-event: a demonstration, a parade or even an open-air gathering. The police would make sure that the official ceremony was not disturbed. Only the Vlaams Blok reacted to the court’s ruling. Blok Chairman Frank Vanhecke said it was a disgrace that the IJzer Pilgrimage Committee had asked a Belgian court to ban a Flemish-nationalist event. Vanhecke even went so far as to blame the Chairman of the IJzer Pilgrimage Committee, Lionel Vandenberghe, for any riots that occurred. Because with this legal step he was asking for incidents, said Vanhecke. In spite of the ban, around 400 counter-demonstrators still turned up, mainly to give flute recitals around the edge of the pilgrimage field, loudly call for the resignation of Chairman Lionel Vandenberghe and scream slogans against ‘Islamites’ and ‘lefty rats’. The official pilgrims again greeted the call for more tolerance with considerable applause. After the IJzer Pilgrimage several far-right hotheads let fly at former VU Chairman and eminence grise of the Flemish Movement, Hugo Schiltz, after first throwing several glasses of beer in his face. Schiltz managed to be rescued by plain-clothes police (FF).

GUY TEGENBOS/ALEXANDRA DE LAET • DE STANDAARD • 26 AUGUST

The IJzer Pilgrimage attracted some 5,000 pilgrims. In past years there were as many as 20,000. Each time there is a threat of riots, the numbers diminish further. The previous celebration of the Eucharist, conducted by Father Staf Nimmeegeers, was attended by around 1,500 people. At the edge of the field stood mainly far-right counter-demonstrators, shouting ‘Lionel out’. They also shouted when they heard Eastern-sounding music from a Kurdish group. According to the age-old pattern, the celebration involved songs, music, poetry, choreography and speeches. Traditionally the Flemish radical and pacifist demands get the most applause; this year this honour went to the calls for tolerance. The relatively small group that still goes to the field turns its back on the counter-demonstrators. Staf Bee- len of the Vlaamse Oudstrijders (VOS) said that ‘truce’ (the Front soldiers’ word for tolerance) ‘begin in the movement itself’.

Lionel Vandenberghe, Chairman of the organising IJzer Pilgrimage Committee, made an emotional plea to the groups, which according to him cause trouble. The Vlaams Blok stayed away. There were large delegations of MPs from the NV-A, Spirit and CD&V. Two Agalev MPs were spotted.

Vandenberghe did not take a particularly vicious swipe at the government, although he did criticise the amendment of the linguistic legislation in the Brussels courts. He called on the parties to refuse to enter into a government without prior negotiations with the Francophones on extra powers for the Federal States (the Communities); social security, justice, railways. Vandenberghe said it was a disgrace that Belgium was sending 5,500 machine guns to Nepal. He said, to loud applause, that this case was ‘worthy of a government crisis’.
De Gucht hits out at socialists
Run-up to the elections has begun

The political year is under way with the first 'new political season' interviews, and the content of these interviews shows that the run-up to the elections (15 June 2003) has begun. In De Morgen (26 August), Karel De Gucht, Chairman of the liberal VLD, took aim at the Socialists, both Flemish (SPA) and Walloon. According to De Gucht, the socialist coalition partners are still too much at odds over the reform of state enterprises, primarily the PS, but also the SPA. He also calls for a 'horizontal splitting' of the NMBS, the Belgian railways company. He wants to regionalise the trains, but not the infrastructure. In addition, he wants to do away with the 60/40 distribution of railway investments between Flanders and Walloon as quickly as possible. De Gucht goes one step further in his offensive: during the negotiations on the for-

Gucht does not understand that the VLD is laying the slow reform of state enterprises at the door of the SPA, since that portfolio is managed by a liberal, namely Rik Daems, says Stevaert (FF).

Opinion
MARK DEWEERDT • DE FINANCIEEL-
ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 27 AUGUST

VLD Chairman Karel de Gucht has very little chance of being wrong if he thinks that a 'stormy political year' is imminent, with tensions within and between parties. Even in a 'stormy' year the country has to be governed. It will require a great deal of skill on the part of First Minister Guy Verhofstadt to not let his Purple-Green coalition come adrift on the pre-election waves, which will get higher and higher as the weeks pass. De Gucht's attack on the Socialists as 'occupiers of the state apparatus' gives a foretaste of what we can expect in the coming months.

For De Gucht, the role of the state is one of the items that must be discussed at the next government negotiations. The VLD also wants to lay the splitting of health-care and the regionalisation of employment policy and the railways on the table. Louis Michel, the as yet unthreatened leader of Francophone liberals, answered De Gucht immediately. He said that the splitting of social security and the regionalisation of transport policy are not up for discussion. Naturally that is the classic answer from the south of the country to Flemish community demands. But now that, thanks to the Lambersmont Agreement, the French Community is not asking for extra money for the first time in ages, it is unclear how the VLD will be able to enforce this next step in state reform. 

Floods

Flanders wants to push through disaster insurance
insurance companies and government blame each other

Last weekend, the heavy rains also caused flooding north of Antwerp, in the Ghent area and in Flemish Brabant south of Brussels. For the victims, who suffered considerable damage to homes and furnishings as a result of the floods, proper insurance against natural disasters would be very welcome. But Minister Picqué's bill, which would make this insurance compulsory, has been sitting in the Chamber Committee for Economic Affairs for over a year. Picqué claimed the regions first had to be asked to define the risk areas. After all, the insurance premiums would be higher in those areas. However, the Flemish government does not want Picqué to wait for the advice of the regions, because it may be 2005 before that advice is complete. There already is a Disaster Fund, but this is woefully unable to compensate all victims. This is because it only comes into play if the rainfall is declared a 'national disaster' (FF).

BART DOBBELAERE • DE STANDAARD • 27 AUGUST

The Flemish government is asking Picqué not to wait for the areas to be defined. After all, if this is to be done on a scientific basis it will take until 2005. We cannot wait that long, says the Flemish government. ‘The supplementary insurance against floods should be included in all policies. The cost must be paid via a general increase in rates,’ it writes. If it subsequently becomes possible to define risk areas, ‘a range of premiums can be considered in the longer term to discourage people from building in certain areas’. The word in Picqué’s office is that the Flemish approach is too simple. ‘The government cannot simply impose a single premium because it violates European law. Prices in the insurance sector are freely variable,’ says Bertrand Leton. ‘We must find another solution.’ What that will be, Leton is not saying. But the office seems convinced that we cannot wait until 2005.

The Professional Association of Insurers (Beroepsvereniging van verzeker-
kers, BVVO) dismisses the ‘European’ argument. ‘The case is politically dead-
locked,’ says François de Clippele. ‘And then it is easy to point the finger to Eu-
rope. The problem is that the government does not want to impose higher premiums. And people do not want to define risk areas because that will seriously affect land prices.’ In the meantime a number of insurers, such as KBC and Omho, are already offering extra policies.
On Friday 23 August the share price of the Nationale Bank rose by 20.8%. The reason for this was a report from the press agency Bloomberg in which Jean-Paul Servais, Principal Private Secretary to Finance Minister Didier Reynders, had said that a nationalisation of the Nationale Bank (NBB) was planned. In contrast to most other national banks, 400,000 of the NBB’s shares are held by the public. Servais denied this, but the Bloomberg journalist told De Morgen that the comments were on tape. The next day an interview appeared in De Financieel-Economische Tijd (24 August) with Luc Coene, right-hand man of Premier Guy Verhofstadt, in which he said that a nationalisation of the Nationale Bank was being examined as a working hypothesis and was probably unavoidable in the longer term. On Saturday Reynders said that a nationalisation was a possibility in the medium or long term, but was not currently a priority. The continuing speculation over the buy-out of minority shareholders led to speculation on the stock exchange. On Monday 26 August more than ten times the average volume of shares was traded. Deminor, a law firm that defends the interests of minority shareholders of the Nationale Bank, the Federal Government, and the banks are asking for the company to be declared bankrupt. As far as the banks are concerned, a global rescue operation plan via a management buy-out by the eldest son of main shareholder Hendrik Seghers, is implausible. Seghers Genetics is part of Seghers Genetics & Nutrition (SGN) and the sister company of Seghers Better Technology (SBT). Together they are housed in the ‘Venegilde Maldense Compagnie’ (VMC), which employs around 1,000 people. SBT is also having difficulties and is rumoured to be holding final negotiations for a rescue scenario. Apparently SBT is holding negotiations in Singapore with minority shareholder Temasek about a new injection of capital and Hendrik Seghers is reputed to have found a potential investor in Monaco (FF).

WILLY VAN DAMME • TRENDS • 29 AUGUST

Seghers Genetics breeds pigs and claims to be able to provide breeders that are insensitive to stress. It recently invested in a joint venture with the UK group Newsham Hybrids in the USA. The company was also active in the UK, China, Brazil, Mexico, Hungary, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands. Seghers Genetics’ debts had risen to 9.2 million euros, 2.9 million euros of which was owed to banks. Earlier this week, uncertainty grew about the rescue of the other part of the group based around Hendrik Seghers, Seghers Better Technology (SBT), formerly Seghers Engineering. Thus, there are mutual claims between SBT and SGN and the annual figures for 2001 of the Liège-based subsidiary Euro Diesel nv are anything but a pretty sight. Furthermore, according to experts, the idea of a capital increase from Monaco is not taken seriously by the banks.

WOUTER VERVENNE • DE FINANCIÉEL-ECONOMISCHER TIJD • 27 AUGUST

Now Coene is rightly suggesting that nationalisation is unavoidable. Since the purpose of the Nationale Bank is different from that of a private company, it cannot function in the same way. The task of the National Bank is to bring about price stability and the stability of the financial system. A company, on the other hand, tries to make as much profit as possible. The Nationale Bank regularly reiterates that European treaties, organic law and articles of association take priority over company law, that the gold and currency reserves are the property of all Belgians and that the revenue from the issuing of bank notes in any country goes to the government.

This view is not particularly credible. Article 4 of the articles of association of the Nationale Bank states: ‘Each share entitles the holder to a proportionate and equal share in the property of the company’s assets and in the distribution of profits.’ But other articles of the articles of association give the State certain privileges. It is difficult to blame Deminor for claiming on the basis of article 4 that the private shareholders are joint owners of the reserves and are entitled to a greater share of the profits.

And yet the Nationale Bank also has a point. It points out that its gold and currency reserves are the result of the good performance of the Belgian economy, more specifically the surpluses of the current account of the balance of payments. Given that the reserves are the fruit of the efforts of all Belgians, it can be argued that the reserves should benefit the whole population. But this reasoning is based more on ethical than on hard legal arguments.

The court will have to decide which is more important, but it may take months or years before it gives its ruling. To avoid continuing conflicts over the National Bank, the Federal Government should become sole shareholder as quickly as possible and do away with the listing on the stock exchange. The key question is what is a fair price for a Nationale Bank share.
Barco continues to hive off graphic activities

The Flemish image-processing group Barco is discarding its graphic activities from its consolidation circle. The group is reducing its interest in the Esko-Graphics joint venture further, from 49 to 19.9%. In Esko-Graphics and another part of its graphics division, Barco ETS, which in June of last year entered into a joint venture with the German technology firm Mania, Barco recorded a shortfall of EUR 28.1 million. This means the group has made a net loss of 17.2 million euros over the first half of the year. In the second quarter of 2001, Barco already had to book 95.9 million euros of extra costs due to write-offs and shortfalls in the same graphics sector. The news was released at the same time as the announcement of a lucrative American contract, an order for flat screens to Lockheed Martin ATM, valued at 3.7 million dollars. Nevertheless, investors punished the poor result. The price of Barco shares fell by 5.44% (FF).

RENÉ DE WITTE • DE FINANCIEEL-ECONOMISCHE TIJD • 29 AUGUST

The goals for the second quarter have been achieved. With this slogan Barco announced its results for the second quarter and first six months on Wednesday before the stock markets opened. The positive message related to the group’s operational performance (current taxable result of 19.4 million euros on a turnover of 176.1 million euros). In net terms, however, Barco suffered a loss of 17.2 million euros after the first half year, compared with a profit of 7.56 million in the same period last year. That loss is the result of a sharp drop in value on the disinvestment of Barco from the Esko-Graphics joint venture. This was set up in September 2001. At that time, Barco merged a number of activities of its subsidiary Barco Graphics with the Danish sectoral stablemate Purup-Eskofot. The merger was presented as a perfect marriage and also gave Barco an exceptional profit of 10 million euros. Barco held 49% of the merger company. The Danish holding Kirkbi owned the rest.

Almost one year later the perfect marriage has gone sour. The graphics sector suffered a lot during this period, which is why Barco decided to reduce its stake in Esko-Graphics to 19.9%, just below the threshold for consolidation. On Barco’s balance sheet, Esko-Graphics can now be found under the financial participations item.

Together with the sale of the Esko-Graphics shares, Barco held all its graphic interests up to the light. With regard to the joint venture that Barco entered into with the German Mania last year and for which Barco received shares from Mania, the same applies. The shares have since only gone down in value on the Frankfurter Wertpapier Markt.

Exhibition of ancient and new spirituality

As part of Brugge 2002 the literary treasures of three vanished Flemish Cistercian abbeys have been brought together in the Grootseminarie. This involves some one hundred medieval manuscripts. In addition to Bernard van Clairvaux’ manuscript, the leading light of the Cistercians, texts by church fathers such as Augustine or scholastic works by Thomas Aquinus, there is also world literature by the first humanists. The Grootseminarie, where some 11 incumbent priests are still undergoing training, is located in an abbey of the Cistercian monks dating from the seventeenth century. Visitors wishing to see the manuscripts must first pass through a church and a cloister, where three contemporary artists have set up an exhibition on the theme of spirituality. The exhibition has the character of a meditation exercise encompassing all ideologies, says Tijd Cultuur (FP).

BERT POPELIER • TIJD CULTUUR • 28 AUGUST

The exhibition ‘Closed world, open books’ in the Grootseminarie brings together a selection of around one hundred medieval manuscripts in Latin. They are all extremely precious items. The pages of a book were made of parchment: untanned, scraped animal hides treated with pumice. A single book could number 50 to 200 parchment pages, known as folios. Each book is unique because it is handwritten. In the three Flemish Cistercian abbeys transcribers were hard at work with sharpened goose feathers. The painstaking calligraphy was mostly done by lay brothers. The transcriber left the necessary space for the decoration of the pages, the elegantly crafted initial letter, the marginal decoration and the miniatures. After all, the illumination was often contracted out to secular workshops in Bruges and Ghent. They can be considered as the pioneers of the Flemish Primitives. In addition to books produced in their own scriptoria, the Flemish abbeys also purchased manuscripts in Paris and Italy. Obviously most books were theological. It almost goes without saying that Bernard of Clairvaux is the most prominent, often in touchingy simply manuscripts. But the monks were also interested in classical authors, from Aristotle to Cicero and Virgil to Valerius Maximus and Seneca. Legal history, medicine, astronomy and mathematics also attracted their interest. Even the works of the first Italian humanists such as Boccaccio and Petrarch found their way into their library.

Visitors to the exhibition do not get to see the manuscripts straight away. They must first pass through a church and a large part of the cloisters. On their
way they are regaled with old and contemporary art. The curator of the exhibition, Laurent Busine, asked the Spanish artist José María Sicilia, the Italian Arte Povera artist Giuseppe Penone and the Fleming David Claerbout for their views on spirituality. Sicilia placed groups of bronze doves on the floor of the church, some of which had a light on their back. Penone planted a tall bronze, partly hollow tree in the inner yard, with the hollow sheltering a living tree and Claerbout has exhibited a vividly lit photo of a misty landscape.

The eyecatcher among the old art is a series of late-medieval wood gisailles.

Until 17 November: Closed world - Open books, exhibition, medieval manuscripts and contemporary art in a splendid medieval site of an abbey; Bruges; info: 070/22.33.02 www.brugge2002.be

**Focus on Flanders** provides a weekly overview of articles from the Flemish press and appears in English, French and German. This newsletter is published by Uitgeverij Lannoo nv, Kasteelstraat 97, 8700 Tielt and can also be obtained by e-mail.

Until 17 November: Closed world - Open books, exhibition, medieval manuscripts and contemporary art in a splendid medieval site of an abbey; Bruges; info: 070/22.33.02 www.brugge2002.be

**EXPO**

Until 15 September: Lost Past 2002 - 1914, exhibition, Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres; info: 070/22.50.02

Until 15 September: 100 years - 100 chairs, exhibition Design Museum, Ghent; info: 09/267.99.99

Until 15 September: Johan Tahon (sculptures) and Permeke, Permekemuseum, Jabbeke (West-Flanders); info: 050/81.12.88

Until 15 September: Living Tomorrow, where visions meet, the house of the future, Vilvoorde; info: www.livtom.be

**Bruges 2002:** info: 070/22.33.02 www.brugge2002.be

---

**Diary**

**MUSIC, DANCE THEATRE**

- **21 August to 7 September:** International Festival Bellenne Brugtinen (dance) with Cie Thör, Catherine Bay, Maren Strack, Bertrand Gorr and Sean Tuan John, Caterina Sagna in the Brigittinenkapel and in CC Recyart, Brussels; info: 02/506.43.00 www.brigittinen.be
- **5, 6 and 7 September:** O pera Don Giovanni by WA Mozart, directed by Gérard Corbiau; Kasteel Ooidonk, Deine; info: 070/22.20.07
- **2 September:** Los Angeles Philharmonic orchestra conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00 www.psk_pba.be
- **7 September:** Festival Happening Ghent with 40 world music and classical music concerts (Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo String Quartet, Bollywood Brass Band, Zambiance, Arno, Therapy?, Flip Kowlier, Millionaire, César by Marcel Pagnol, Venetiaanse Torens, Gaanderijen, Ostend; info: 059/80.55.00
- **8 September:** Festival Happening Brussel: 50 concerts in and around the PSK, Brussels; info: 02/233.77.88
- **18 September:** Orchestre révolutionnaire et romantique conducted by John Eliot Gardiner, PSK, Brussels; info: 02/507.82.00 www.psk_pba.be
- **4 to 29 September:** Cirque du Soleil with ’Salittmboanco’, Heizel, Brüssel; info: 0900/84.07
- **7 September:** Guided by voices, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- **10 and 11 September:** Bryan Ferry, PSK, Brussels and Elisabethzaal, Antwerp; info: 0900/26060
- **23 September:** Kraftwerk, Vooruit, Ghent; info: 0900/26060 www.vooruit.be
- **8 September:** National Heritage day Flemish Heritage: symbols; info: 02/226.11.38 www.monument.vlaanderen.be
- **7 and 10 September:** De Filharmonie conducted by Arturo Tamayo with compositions by Ravel, Messiaen, Debussy and Breuys, De Singel, Antwerp; info: 02/218.37.32
- **13 September:** Leffinge uilen with Arno, Therapy?, Flip Fowler, Millionaire, Leffinge (near Ostend); info: 059/70.087.22 www.leffingeuilen.be
- **18 to 21 September:** Drumming Live, Rosas, dance with Steve Reich compositions performed by Ictus Ensemble, klaitheater, Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.klaitheater.be
- **15 September:** Elvis Costello, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be
- **13 to 15 September:** Leffingeuilen with Arno, Therapy?, Flip Fowler, Millionaire, Leffinge (near Ostend); info: 059/70.087.22 www.leffingeuilen.be
- **18 to 21 September:** Drumming Live, Rosas, dance with Steve Reich compositions performed by Ictus Ensemble, klaitheater, Brussels; info: 02/201.59.59 www.klaitheater.be
- **15 September:** Elvis Costello, Ancienne Belgique, Brussels; info: 02/548.24.24 www.abconcerts.be

---

**Focus on Flanders** provides a weekly overview of articles from the Flemish press and appears in English, French and German. This newsletter is published by Uitgeverij Lannoo nv, Kasteelstraat 97, 8700 Tielt and can also be obtained by e-mail.

---

**Editor in chief:** Frank Vandecaveye

- **Advisory board:** Luc Demeester (Lannoo), Rik Van Cauwelaert (director Knack), Koen Clement (manager director, De Morgen), Francis Decoster (information officer, Flemish Community), Mark Deweerd (journalist, Financiën-Economische Tijdschrift), Michael Stabenow (correspondent, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung), L. Van Cauwelaert (journalist, Brigittinenkapel), Evelyn Lemmens, Jan Van Doren (director KNM); Vlaams Economisch Verbond), Bernard Bulcke (De Standaard)

---

**Translation:** Eurologos

**Printing:** Drukkerij Lannoo nv, Tielt

**Responsible editor:** Luc Demeester, Marke

**Subscription rate by post and e-mail:** 220 euro

**Either transfer the sum to account no.:** 472-1010001-19 with the KBC in Roeselare. Or give us the number and expiry date of your credit card via Eurocard.

**Telephone:** 051/42.42.99

**Fax:** 051/40.11.52

**E-mail:** frank.vandecaveye@lannoo.be